

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization for accommodating at least an endoscope and performing high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization, comprising:

an accommodating recess section for accommodating an elongated ~~and thin~~ insertion part of the endoscope having a flexible section; and

pressing force preventing means for preventing ~~local~~ pressing forces from being applied to ~~the~~ an outer surface of the flexible section when accommodated in the accommodating recess section.

2. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 1, wherein the pressing force preventing means is includes a lid member provided with respect to the accommodating recess section wherein the insertion part of the endoscope is accommodated, the lid member covering the accommodating recess section such that the pressing forces are not applied to the outer surface of the flexible section.

3. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 2, wherein the lid member is capable of separating the insertion part of the endoscope from ~~the~~ peripheral elements of the endoscope.

4. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 3, wherein the lid member is capable of positioning the peripheral elements of the endoscope on ~~the opposite~~ a first side of the lid opposite thereof to ~~the~~ a second side of the lid corresponding to the accommodating recess section, when ~~it~~ the lid is closed against the accommodating recess section.

5. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 3, wherein the lid member is provided with a restricting member which surrounds and restricts the insertion part to a predetermined shape on ~~the~~ a first side of the lid opposite side thereof to the a second side facing the accommodating recess section, when the lid is closed against the accommodating recess section.

6. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 2, wherein the lid member is formed with a cutaway section through which a bend operating knob provided on ~~the~~ an operating part of the endoscope can project, after the endoscope is accommodated in the recess section.

7. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 1, wherein the pressing force preventing means ~~is constituted by providing~~ includes a flexible restricting member which deforms under ~~a predetermined a provided~~ external pressure, in the accommodating recess section.

8. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 7, wherein the flexible restricting member ~~which~~ surrounds and restricts the insertion part of the endoscope to a predetermined shape and comprises the is ~~provided to the lid member of the vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam~~ sterilization.

9. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 1, wherein the ~~pressure~~ pressing force preventing means ~~is a separate member from the vessel and is~~ comprises a protecting cylindrical body, that can be

subject to high-temperature and high-pressure steam sterilization, having an internal diameter that is greater than the external form of the insertion part of the endoscope.

10. (Original) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 1, wherein the accommodating recess section is formed by a restricting member which surrounds and restricts the insertion part of the endoscope to a predetermined shape, the restricting member defining a clearance with respect to the insertion part.

11. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 1, wherein the ~~accommodating recess section is formed by~~ pressing force preventing means includes a restricting member which prevents predetermined portions of the insertion part of the endoscope from contacting or overlapping with other portions of the endoscope.

12. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 1, wherein the ~~accommodating recess section is formed by~~ pressing force preventing means includes a flexible restricting member which restricts the insertion part of the endoscope to a predetermined shape and which deforms to a greater extent than the insertion part in response to a predetermined external force.

13. (Currently Amended) The vessel for high-temperature high-pressure steam sterilization according to claim 1, wherein the ~~accommodating recess section is formed with~~ smooth pressing force preventing means includes substantially planar faces which are formed on a portion contacting the insertion part of the endoscope.

14. (Canceled)

15. (Canceled)